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FOUR THICK-BILLED MURRE RECORDS FOR MONTEREY BAY

On 27 August 1964 I identified a living adult female Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia arra*, which had been delivered to the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History by Patrick McGreal of Sacramento, California. The bird had been found on the local beach in weakened condition with oil on its plumage. Incomplete molting had left the flight feathers badly worn. The white maxillary marking was clearly visible and bill measurements left no doubt as to identification of this bird. To my knowledge this was the first record of the species on the West Coast of the United States south of British Columbia, a range extension of over 10° latitude beyond its previous casual southern record. There are no known records for the States of Oregon or Washington.

A second Thick-billed Murre specimen, that of an immature male in winter plumage was found dead on the Monterey Beach on 22 February 1965 by Helen A. Lind, Assistant Curator of the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History. The head markings lacked the post ocular line of *Uria aalge* and the dark feathers of the crown extended to the auricular region, there blending to the throat. The white bill marking was less clearly discernible than in the first specimen. Though the bill shape indicated a Thick-billed Murre, bill measurements did not fit perfectly with Ridgway's key in *Birds of North and Middle America* (part 8, p. 719, 1919). Because these two records represented a considerable range extension, the specimens were sent to Dr. Robert Storer of the University of Michigan who confirmed the identifications.

The following are the measurements (in millimeters) of the adult female and immature male (respectively) Thick-billed Murre specimens from California: total length 445, 431; wing chord 200 (worn), 214; chord of culmen 41, 40; depth of bill at gonydeal angle 15, 13; tarsus 38, 35; gonydeal angle to bill tip 22, 20.

Subsequently two sight records of Thick-billed Murres have been recorded for Monterey Bay. The first healthy bird was an adult in summer plumage found just outside the Monterey Marina on 2 October 1966 by Ellen Stephenson of Pasadena, California. It was later photographed and observed by numerous individuals. The second healthy bird, also an adult, in summer plumage, was found by myself on 9 April 1968 approximately 10 nautical miles north of Pt. Pinos in Monterey Bay. This bird was then viewed by five boat loads of observers. The above records were published in *Audubon Field Notes* (19:73, 1965; 19:413, 1965; 21:74, 1967; and 22:572, 1968, respectively).

The occurrence of four records in four years leaves one to speculate that the Thick-billed Murre is probably a regular southern straggler and that additional observations may be expected. Reasons have been advanced for the appearance of Thick-bills in Monterey Bay. The most plausible is suggested by Dr. Storer, that these birds probably followed migrating members of the northern race of Common Murre, *U. a. inornata*. That Thick-bills have not previously been recorded in this southern area must be due to their close similarity with the abundant Common Murre and the requirement for very close and careful observation to separate them in the field.

Both in the hand and in the field a decided similarity exists between Thick-billed and Common Murres. Ridgway's key separates the two species by length of

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FIGURE 1. First California record of Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia arra*. Pacific Grove, Monterey County, California, 27 August 1964. Photos by Vernal L. Yadon.

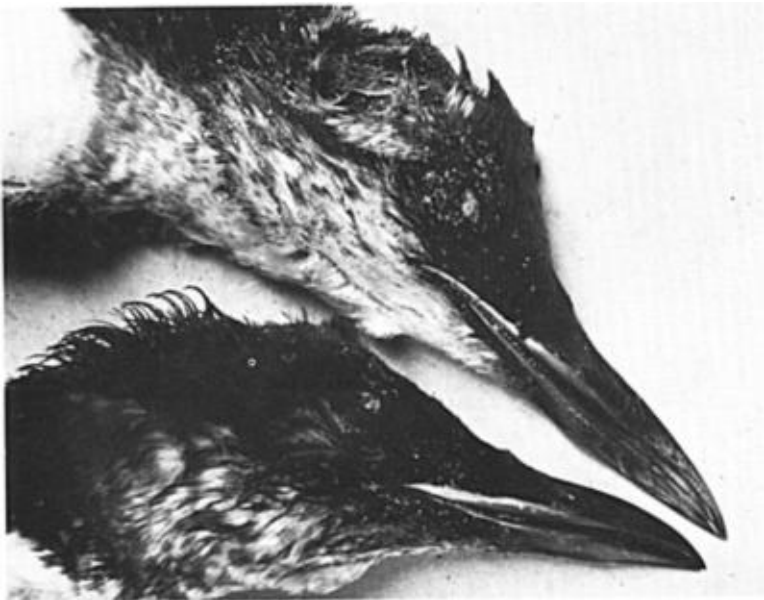


FIGURE 2. The second California record of Thick-billed Murre, *Uria lomvia arra* (lower specimen) and a specimen of Common Murre, *Uria aalge californica*. Both specimens show white on the tomium which is atypical for *Uria aalge*.

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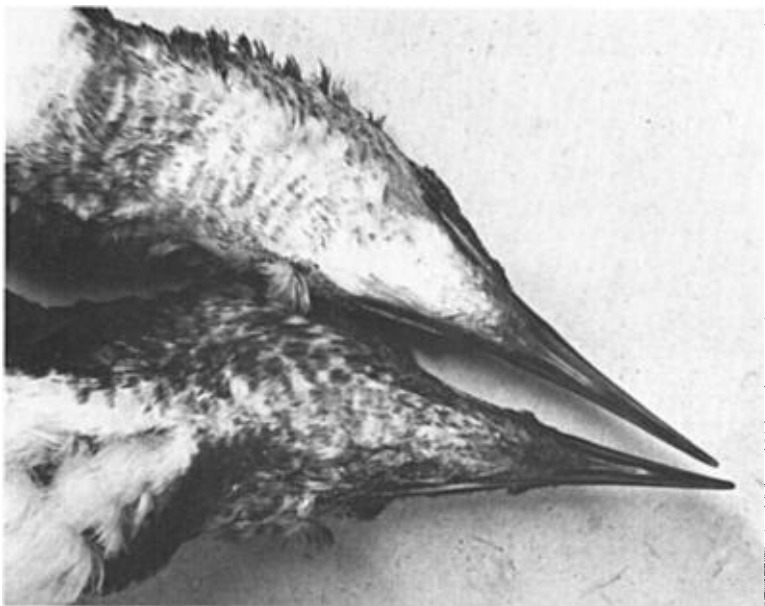


FIGURE 3. Ventral bill view of a Common Murre and a Thick-billed Murre (bottom) illustrating the greatly shorter dimension from the gonydeal angle to the bill tip in the latter species, which appeared in most of the specimens measured.

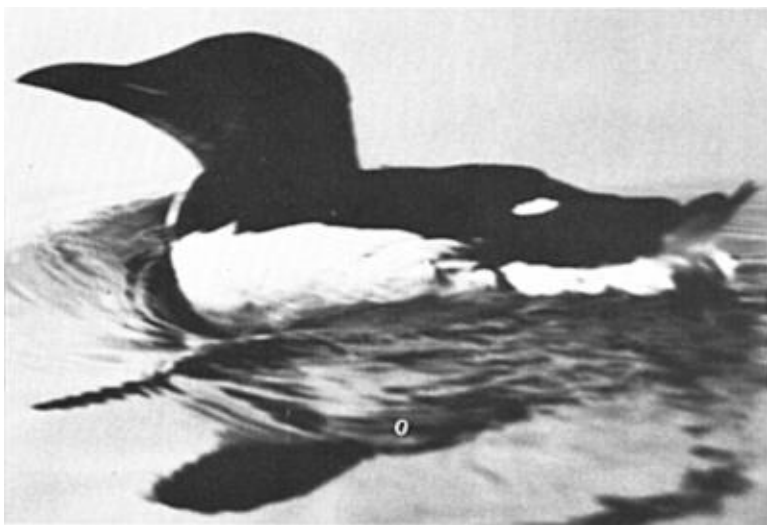


FIGURE 4. Adult Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia* at Monterey Marina on 3 October 1966.

Photo by Arnold Small

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bill and depth of bill at the gonydeal angle. Where three times the depth is greater than the culmen length, one should have a Thick-billed Murre. However a summer plumaged Common Murre in the collection of the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History shows there are exceptions to the key. Typical Thick-bills have a white line on the tomium and the upper mandible is more abruptly decurved at the tip.

About 80% of the Thick-billed specimens I have measured show a remarkably shorter distance from the gonydeal angle to the tip of the lower mandible. This measurement is about half that of Common Murres (approximately 20 mm as opposed to approximately 40 mm). The bill measurements of the other 20% converge. A representative tray of specimens will show great variability in bill lengths and depths.

In the field one should not report any bird as a Thick-billed unless a white tomium line was clearly seen and the bill shape studied. One hundred yards would be about maximum scope distance. Caution is indicated since specimen #753306 of the American Museum of Natural History, collected by R. H. Beck on 16 October 1912 looks very much like a winter plumaged Thick-bill, but its bill characteristics leave no doubt that it is the common species. In this specimen no post ocular line exists. Instead, the dark color of the crown extends below the eye, there blending to a light throat. Occasionally the Common Murre will also show light areas on the tomium.

These first records will eventually be deposited with the California Academy of Sciences. *Vernal L. Yadon, Museum of Natural History, Pacific Grove, California 93950.*